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LETTRE MENSUELLE SUR L'ÉVANGÉLISATION

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In a letter written to the Evangelism Department of the World Council of Churches Dr. Malik made the following point. "One of the needs which active and concerned Christians must keep in mind is the need to stress the liberal, humane, intellectual, philosophical elements in the Western tradition or in any tradition. On the purely human level, namely, on the level of the natural reason, these elements are combatted today by practically all movements and tendencies. But they constitute the natural glory of man. The Church must come to their rescue and support them to the utmost."

He was requested to expand this paragraph and the statement given below is the result. It is composed of extracts from two of his major lectures.

Dr. Charles Malik of the American University in Beirut, Lebanon, was formerly Ambassador of Lebanon to the United States and the Lebanese representative in the U.N.O. General Assembly.

THE CHRISTIAN EDUCATOR AND THE TASK OF EVANGELISM

What is ultimately at stake in the world today is not so much governments or parties or systems or even nations, as culture, freedom, reason, nature, whether there is an objective truth before which man must bow, whether by reason we can attain and be absolutely sure of that truth, not only concerning such simple things as mathematics and physical nature, but concerning such delicate matters as economics, politics, religion, and the final things. Despair of reason and the possibility of agreement on the basis of reason is at the bottom of all trouble in the world today. And since reason constitutes the dignity of man, and the university is the temple of reason, the crisis has hit both the most precious thing in man and the temple that has served and nurtured that thing for 3.000 years.

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The spirit of an age incarnates itself best in the philosophies and movements of that age. For a hundred years now, reason, in its peaceful vision and in its quiet certainty of the truth, has been under ruthless attack. Dark anti-intellectual forces have been at work. Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and William James speak of the primacy of the will. Bergson exalts feeling and intuition, and a dark, cosmic, unknown something called "l'élan vital" and works out endless reasons to prove the inadequacy of human reason. The doctrine of evolution, which has thoroughly permeated the thinking of the Western world, has one fundamental presupposition: that something comes out of nothing - a wholly irrational principle. Freud and his school are obsessed by instinct, sex, dreams, the dark impulses of our lower nature. Many scientists, quietly allowing their reason to be overwhelmed by the experimental procedure, a procedure, after all, set up originally by reason itself, are sceptical of reason's ability to reach any final truth; and so they speak of relativity, probability, statistical averages. The result is the dissolution of everything, including moral standards, in a trackless sea of relativity and flux. Then consider the movements of the age. There is first nationalism, moderate and radical; there is then socialism, moderate and radical; and finally there has been - and there still is, in diverse forms - the new tribalism thundering in the name of race, soil, and blood. It can be shown that all these movements are determined by a tinge of irrationalism, that all reject the concrete universal, that all start from an arbitary set of first principles. It can also been shown, that all these movements rely upon mass consciousness, and that the articulation of such consciousness is necessaritly anti-liberal and anti-intellectual.

Anti-intellectualism therefore is of the essence of this age. Its basic tenet is that the intellect, reason, mind, is not ultimate and creative; that, on the contrary, there is something more ultimate and original than reason, be it matter, or force, or the will, or emotion, or feeling, or intuition, or the so-called "interests of society", or "the nation", or "the class", or the particular revelation of a particular "party", or a wholly indeterminate "X" from which everything is derived, or the darkness of the night; and that therefore reason is secondary, derivative, subordinate. Times there were when people called that which is beyond and above reason, that from which reason came and to which reason must return, that on which reason ultimately depends - I say times there were when people called this first principle "Supreme Reason"; meaning that it has infinitely more "reason", infinitely more structure and form and light and content than our poor human reason has. But now that which is above reason is not reason at all; it is dark, unaccountable power under which reason is asked to accommodate itself as best it could. This turning away from light and distinctness and this facing toward darkness and indistinctness are the great spiritual crisis of our times. Plato and Aristotle and all the epochal thinkers of the Western as well as the Middle Eastern traditions would call it the "Great Inversion".

It would seem, therefore, that higher, liberal education is called upon in this age to resist and correct this inversion. At a time when the masses are rising everywhere and making their taste and imagination

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the norm of everything; when sense and excitement and movement are pursued and worshipped without restraint; when the lower and primitive all over the world have risen up in arms against the authoritative, the true, the perfect; when the final appeal is not to something universal, which can be only reason, but to some arbitary determination backed up by force; when individuals, groups, and nations all over the world are clamoring for what they call their individual rights even without regard to others; at a time when the rebellion is against all that is rooted, traditional, tested, at peace with and sure of itself; at such a time it is good, I think, that there are oases - namely, the universities of the free world - still enjoying great power and prestige, which propose to continue the quest of truth in freedom and independence; which believe that there is something objective, independent in itself, in every realm of being, which it is our highest glory to seek and embrace; which trust the diverse disciplines of reason, developed and refined for 3.000 years at such enormous pains, as perfectly adequate to grasp their object; which believe that there are authorities, experts, people who really know, who should be trusted in their respective fields far above the whims of the masses; which therefore deny that the masses can set the standards of taste and truth and action; to which history is something real and living, something not to rebel against as all evil, but to understand and respect and absorb; which promote the highest cultivation of the mind as an end in itself, irrespective of any utility; which invite and thrive upon criticism, study, patient elaboration, the quest of the remote and possibly unattainable; which fiercely fight any dictation upon reason from any source outside itself and its own autonomous tradition; which love structure, ideas, knowledge, the joyous light of reason; and which make it offensively plain that a Socrates dissatisfied is infinitely to be preferred to a pig satisfied. It seems, I say, that the universities, higher education, the liberal arts, are called in the present crisis, and are able, to perform an historic function of the first magnitude.

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Now everything which I have said about reason, about man, about the universe, about the art of teaching, would be perfectly intelligible to Plato and Aristotle. In fact, it is but a pale reflection of their own philosophy. Western education has undergone many phases during the last twenty-five centuries, but throughout its checkered development the Greeks remained its fundamental core.

But if the Greeks invented this thing, they could not sustain it, and in its period of decline Greek culture was marked with a note of despair. Man, reason, nature, the universe - all this was not enough, and indeed if it were all, then "all was vanity and vexation of the spirit, and there was no profit under the sun." The deepest thing about man is not his knowledge and his reason, though these are absolutely wonderful; nor is it his natural, human, pagan joy, although this too is perfectly wonderful. The deepest thing about man is that he craves for forgiveness and salvation; he knows that there is something fundamentally wrong about his heart and he wishes somebody would set it right for him. Man cannot live except in the hope, based upon some certainty, that all will be well in the end between him and God, and that death is already overcome.

It is not an accident that the liberal arts, whose aim is the natural perfection of the soul, have flourished only within the Christian tradition, for only in this tradition is the ultimacy and the absolute inviolability of the individual human soul radically affirmed. When God Himself, not just directs or commands or inspires us, but suffers our very nature in order to save us, when we are assured that "there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth," and when the great King, our Lord, says that if we care for "the least of these (His) brethren," we have really cared for Him, then obviously, not reason, not nature, not the universe, not systems of thought, not general causes, not humanity in general, but the individual human soul, the soul of my immediate neighbour, becomes the most important thing. Liberal education will wither away into some form of professionalism or into subservience to some social or political "cause" unless it is sustained at its roots by Christian charity, and wherever the liberal arts prosper or even exist, there you can trace, directly or indirectly, fully or residually, the original impulse of the Church.

The Christian college does not change the contents of the liberal arts: the sciences, physical and social, literature, history, philosophy - all these disciplines remain objectively what they are. But such a college makes five distinctive contributions.

First, if it does not change their contents, it at least guarantees, as we have just seen, the possibility and the continuity of the liberal arts. The cultivation of intellectual virtue for its own sake regardless of any utility if carried out generation after generation, is only intelligible as an expression of a transcendent act of love for man for his own sake.

Second, because at the heart of the Christian outlook is the infinite worth of the individual human soul for which God Himself had to suffer and die, and because there is an essential unity about the soul, the Christian liberal arts college must develop some unified feeling. Some essential connectedness must be worked out between the various sciences and disciplines leading up to some simple, unified outlook. This is the task of philosophy, and it is for this reason that in the Christian liberal arts philosophy plays a central role.

Third, there are the distinctive Christian values of fairness, freedom, consideration for others, self-restraint, honesty, integrity, unselfishness and love, which should permeate the entire moral atmosphere of Christian liberal education.

Fourth, if the West cannot be understood apart from the Christian heritage, then side by side with the secular sciences, disciplines should be developed in matters sacred. The religious dimension of history is an integral part of the objective data of experience, and therefore the liberally educated mind must seek to understand it. The nature of God and His ways with men, the history of the Church, the diversity and unity of Christian doctrine, the great classics of Christian literature and art, the life of the Saints, all this wealth of material is just as exciting, just as liberalizing, just as worthy of the mind of a free man, as

the study of the stars, or of the animal kingdom, or of the forms of political organization, or of Shakespeare.

And finally, somewhere, within or behind the liberal arts college, somebody is praying or has prayed, somebody is kneeling or has knelt before the Lord our God seeking His forgiveness and His illumination. While the Church is distinct from and does not depend upon any human activity, including education, and including even Christian liberal education, the Christian liveral arts are a by-product of the active life and worship of the Church.

The liberal arts believe in and promote reason, but the mood of the age is to deny any original efficacy to reason, and to deify instead force, emotion, the will. The liberal arts believe in the possibility of objective truth, but the temper of the times scoffs at anything objective in itself, especially if it be "objective truth". The liberal arts, as the very term suggests, glorifies liberty, the freedom of the spirit, but nothing is more sorely tried today than freedom. The liberal arts regard the soul of man as inviolable as an end in itself but to our age man is important as a social animal, or a political partisan, or an economic man. The liberal arts believe in and teach the tradition, but nothing is more hateful to the strident revolutionaries of this age than the traditional, than what is handed down to us from the past. The liberal arts recognize some order, some hierarchy, some higher and lower in existence, but the spirit of this age is precisely to rebel against all that is high, noble, given, perfect, transcendent. The Christian liberal arts ground themselves in God and His providence, but the materialism and secularism of this epoch have long ago announced the death of God. The liberal arts lead up to the infinite peace and rest of the vision of the truth, but if there is any dominant philosophy today it is the philosophy of change and conflict, and if there is one characteristic of this age it is the absence of any peace and rest.

The Christian liberal arts are therefore the desired corrective for this age. Let therefore those who are called to tend them realise the infinite significance of their calling.